

72 SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND
REFORMER

work, lie felt greatly inspirited, though lie still remained at Hachette's, intending, he said, to keep Ms post for several years if possible, in order to increase "the circle of Ms relations." Meantime, as it was necessary he should "make haste, and rhyming might delay Mm," he left the Muse for ulterior wooing, — that is, if she should not then have grown angry, or have eloped with some more naif and tender lover than himself. Briefly, as he was writing prose to Ms personal advantage, he intended to persevere with it.

It may be said of Zola's first volume that it was gracefully, prettily written; that more than one of the tales contained in it was a poem in prose. Brimful of the author's early life in Provence, his youthful fancies and aspirations, those "Oontes a Ninon" gave no warning of what was to follow from his pen. And yet at the very time of writing most of them he was being weaned from romance and fable and idyl. Not only had he taken considerable interest in About's "Madelon," but he had been studying Balzac, and particularly Flaubert's "Madame Bovary," the perusal of which had quite stirred him. A man had come, axe in hand, into the huge and often tangled forest which Balzac had left behind him; and the formula of the

modern novel
now appeared in a blaze of light. When "
Madame Bovary "
was issued in 1860, the average Parisian, the
average literary
man even, regarded it merely as a *succ&s de
scandale*. Many
of those who praised the book failed to
understand its real
import; and when Flaubert was satirised in
the popular
theatrical *rfoue*, " Ohd! les petits Agneaux,"
half Paris, by
way of deriding him, hummed the trivial lines
sung by the
actress who impersonated "Madame Bovary":